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The Insanity of the Sensualist.

A

SERMON

PREACHED TO

YOUNG PEOPLE,

DECEMBER 25, 1765.

In New Broad-Street.

By JOHN PALMER.

——————————— Ubi prava
Stultitia, hic summa est insania ——
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M DCC LXVI.

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LUKE XV. 17, 18.

And when he came to himſelf, he ſaid, How many hired ſervants of my father's have bread enough, and to ſpare, and I periſh with hunger? I will ariſe and go to my father.-------

AMONG the many vain and arrogant boaſts made by the ſons of prodigality and vice, the men of pleaſure, as they are generally called, there is no one more common than that of the ſuperiority of their reaſon and diſcernment. Were we to form our opinion of them from the repreſentation which they give of them-

ſelves, they are the people, who can alone make any juſt pretences to freedom of thought and depth of penetration, and with whom only wiſdom dwells. At leaſt, whatever they pleaſe to allow to the underſtanding and judgment of others in different matters; yet with reſpect to that grand intereſting queſtion, what is the beſt ſcheme to be purſued, for attaining the true enjoyment, and making the moſt, of life, this is a point, concerning which all the reſt of mankind are, in their eſtimation, totally ignorant; but which they, by the dint of a peculiar ſagacity, have been ſo happy as clearly to aſcertain. To place the foundation of human felicity in a temper and conduct regulated by the laws of virtue and religion, to conſider man as formed and fitted by his Creator for the participation of any pleaſures ſuperior to thoſe of ſenſe and appetite, or, however, to repreſent him as under any obligation to reſtrain himſelf in thoſe gratifications, to which his

his animal conſtitution inclines him, for the ſake of intellectual and moral enjoyment; all this, theſe maſterly geniuſes have found out to be a mere deluſion. Such notions, they plainly perceive, owe their origin to the invention of, crafty politicians, or, mercenary prieſts, calculated for no other end, but to hold the world in ſubjection to them, and eſtabliſh a cruel dominion over mankind, on the ruins of that freedom of thinking and acting, to which they are by nature entitled. As a ſtill farther addition to that generoſity of ſentiment, the reputation of which they would ſo gladly propagate; we are, perhaps, to be alſo informed that they themſelves, through the prejudices of education, were once ſhackled with the prevailing vulgar tenets, but have at length, by a noble exertion of the intelligent faculty, broke through all theſe reſtraints, and glorioufly aſſerted their native liberty.

Thus do the ſons of lawleſs pleaſure not uncommonly triumph in the conceit of their exalted underſtanding and refined ſenſe, ſtigmatizing thoſe, who, from a regard to conſcience, will not run into the ſame exceſs of riot with themſelves, as men of weak and little minds, who are ſacrificing the higheſt delights of life in purſuit of ſome viſionary good, which has no exiſtence at all but in their own ſickly, diſtempered, imagination. Bold and confident, however, as theſe men may be in their aſſertions of this kind, we muſt be ſo far from admitting the truth of them, that we think ourſelves, on the contrary, fully warranted, not only from what paſſes in our own minds, but alſo by the authority of thoſe names, which have done the greateſt honour to human nature, in pronouncing them abſolutely falſe and groundleſs; and, in oppoſition to their vaunting claims of manly thought and clear diſcernment, ſhall take the freedom

to

to enter againſt them the mortifying charge of having really renounced the boaſted prerogative of reaſon, as a guide of life, and become in this worſt ſenſe truly inſane.

Into this view of the ſtate and condition of the ſenſualiſt and voluptuary we are naturally led, by the deſcription given of the young prodigal in the paſſage which we have choſe as the foundation of the following diſcourſe; which will, we apprehend, furniſh out ſuch reflections as ſeem peculiarly ſuitable, and, it is hoped, by the divine bleſſing, will not be without their uſe, to that part of the audience, for whoſe benefit the ſervice of this day is more immediately intended. But before we proceed to the ſubject, on which we propoſe chiefly to inſiſt, we ſhall offer a general, brief, account of the deſign and conſtruction of that moſt beautiful and affecting parable, whence the text is taken.

The

The audience preſent on this occaſion, as we ſhall find on looking back to the beginning of the chapter, beſides our Lord's own diſciples, conſiſted of the Publicans and Sinners on one part, and the Phariſees and Scribes on the other. The Publicans, I ſcarce need obſerve, were the Roman tax-gatherers, whoſe office, though by no means unlawful in itſelf, was yet ſo extremely hateful to the Jews, as at once to blaſt the reputation of thoſe who engaged in it: and it may therefore fairly be preſumed from this certain injurious conſequence, though not from the nature, of their employment, that thoſe who followed it were in general perſons of very immoral and diſſolute lives. Since it can hardly be imagined, that any, who had not previouſly loſt their character, or could find other means of ſubſiſtence, would apply for an office which was regarded as ſo very diſgraceful, and muſt neceſſarily render them ſo utterly

utterly odious to their countrymen. * Probably, not a few of them were the younger branches of conſiderable families, who had ſunk themſelves thus low, by a courſe of extravagance and licentious indulgence; and, in relation to the nature of thoſe vices, to which they were moſt addicted, which ſeem to have been of the kind, juſt now hinted at, as well as to fix a brand of the deepeſt infamy upon them, out of reſentment to their office, Publicans and Sinners were among the Jews uſually connected together; the latter of theſe appellations appearing plainly to have had the particular reference before-mentioned, or being by way of diſtinction applied to ſuch perſons as were more eſpecially guilty of the vices of ſenſuality. Such was the character of one part of our Lord's audience. The Scribes and Phariſees, on the other hand, however free they might be from the

* See Mr. Bourn's maſterly Diſcourſes on the Parables.

vices of the Publicans and Sinners, and which are generally looked upon as more ſcandalous, were yet notoriouſly under the power of thoſe ſtill more incurable ones, hypocriſy, avarice, and pride. Of the laſt we have a moſt convincing and ſhameful proof, in thoſe malicious and cruel aſperſions which they caſt on our bleſſed Maſter, for his generous attempts to effect the reformation of thoſe of their countrymen, who, in their own opinion, ſtood ſo peculiarly in need of it; and who, bad as they were, ſeem yet ſo far from incorrigible, as, on the contrary, to attend the miniſtry of our Lord with thoſe good diſpoſitions, to which theſe ſelf-conceited men, by whom they were treated with ſuch ſovereign diſdain, were altogether ſtrangers. Had the leaſt ſpark of candour or humanity remained in the breaſt of the latter, they could not but have regarded our Lord's condeſcenſion to their unhappy brethren, as proceeding from the worthieſt motives, and highly applauded

plauded his endeavours to reclaim them, as truly noble and godlike. But inſtead of putting this juſt conſtruction on the familiar converſe he held with them, they interpreted it in the worſt ſenſe which the moſt inveterate malice could poſſibly invent; reproaching him, as being himſelf a glutton and a wine-bibber, and preferring, in his eſteem, men of the like baſe and odious characters, before thoſe, who, as they themſelves would be thought, were highly worthy and deſerving.

From theſe brief remarks, as to the different parties which were now before our Lord, we ſhall be furniſhed with an eaſy key to the parable under conſideration.

By the penitent prodigal, is evidently intended, the Publicans and Sinners; the compaſſionate Father, our bleſſed Saviour himſelf; and the reſentful elder ſon, the Phariſees and Scribes. The leading de-

ſign, which our Lord has plainly in view, both in this and the preceding parable of the ſheep and piece of money that were loſt, is to vindicate himſelf in that condeſcending regard which he paid to the Publicans and Sinners, in oppoſition to thoſe reproaches with which the haughty Phariſees and Scribes unjuſtly loaded him on this account. As to this laſt party, it muſt be particularly obſerved that the repreſentation given of them in the parable before us, is grounded on the ſuppoſition that they were poſſeſſed of that ſuperior merit, in compariſon of the Publicans and Sinners, which they boaſted; to the objection ariſing from which againſt our Saviour's conduct towards the latter, he, in the concluding part of the parable, makes a direct and full reply; and, by thus modelling his narration, adds peculiar force to it, as a defence of himſelf. But of this, with many other of its maſterly ſtrokes and inimitable beauties, we cannot at preſent take further

ther notice: as it is more than time that we proceed to thoſe reflections, which that particular part of it, ſelected for our preſent meditation, naturally affords.

In the text, the young prodigal, when he formed the reſolution of returning to his father, is deſcribed, as "coming to himſelf," by which is clearly intimated, that, previous to this, and during the ſcene of his riot and exceſs, he was beſide himſelf—had loſt the uſe of his reaſon, and was really acting the part of a madman—a very ſtriking, and no leſs juſt, repreſentation of the character and ſtate of the libertine and ſenſualiſt, notwithſtanding all his arrogant pretences to ſuperior intelligence and wiſdom.

The nature of this inſanity, with ſuch marks and ſymptoms of it, as are certain and apparent, and which clearly demonſtrate its aſcendency in the mind, we ſhall now endeavour to point out.—

And here, let it, firſt of all, be carefully noticed that every man, as he came from the hands of his ſupremely wiſe and benevolent Creator, was endowed with that power of thought and reaſon, which, rightly cultivated and improved, would have given him the juſt command over himſelf, and taught him, ſo to diſcipline his paſſions, and regulate his conduct, as infallibly to have ſecured his well being and happineſs. This is a meaſure of capacity which the great father of mankind has given to every one of his numerous family. If any therefore are ſo unhappy, as to loſe the poſſeſſion of themſelves, to fall under the power of wild and head-ſtrong paſſions, by which they are urged on to purſuits, ſubſervient of their real and moſt important intereſts, and which entail miſery and ruin upon them; this is not to be imputed to any original imbecillity in the intelligent principle, or an invincible natural depravity of diſpoſition in the mind,

diſabling

diſabling them from making a wiſer choice and acting a better part in life. Than this, no ſuppoſition can be more injurious to the character of the infinitely glorious and adorable God; every one of whoſe manifold works are made in wiſdom and goodneſs, and whoſe tender mercies are extended over all. He could poſſibly have no other intention in bringing men into exiſtence but to make them happy; and cannot, therefore, but have conſtituted them in ſuch a manner, as that, if they fail of happineſs, it muſt be their own fault, and can be owing to nothing but a criminal neglect or perverſion of the faculties which he has graciouſly imparted to them. From this ſource thoſe many great and dreadful miſchiefs, which overtake ſinners, as the conſequences of their vicious indulgencies, are evidently derived. The inſanity which has taken hold of their minds is a moral one, of their own contracting, and for which the evils reſulting hence are the

proper

proper and deſerved puniſhments. And that they are, in this moral view and eſtimation, really beſide themſelves, their conduct furniſhes clear and undeniable proofs—They give up the moſt ſubſtantial and laſting good——They lay themſelves open to the greateſt and moſt durable evils——And they forfeit the one, and incur the other, in ſuch a purſuit of the gratifications of ſenſe, as, inſtead of increaſing, tends to leſſen the enjoyment of thoſe very pleaſures, the love of which has ſo much engroſſed their hearts, and for the ſake of which they make this large and moſt valuable ſacrifice—And if this charge can be ſupported, who, that is a fair and impartial judge, will not readily pronounce that the minds of theſe men are in a ſtate of the moſt extreme infatuation? Let us briefly examine the ſeveral particulars of the charge——

1ſt, The devotees to intemperate, lawleſs, pleaſures, give up the moſt ſubſtantial

ſtantial and laſting good, which they were deſigned and fitted by their Creator to enjoy. By this, you need not be told, is immediately intended—that ſatisfaction which is of the intellectual and moral kind, which reſults from an enlightened underſtanding, and the orderly and regular ſtate of the paſſions and affections. It includes in it that ſound wiſdom, which is health to the ſoul; clear views of thoſe great and momentous truths, which can alone yield an adequate ſupport to the mind under all the viciſſitudes and adverſities of life, and which lay at the foundation of all the moſt valuable intereſts of our being. Together with this moſt uſeful and delightful knowledge are cloſely connected—that moral rectitude and excellence, which conſtitute the brighteſt reſemblance of the infinitely perfect and bleſſed Deity, in the peculiar and diſtinguiſhing glories of his nature and character—that juſt ſubordination of all the inferior tendencies

dencies in our frame to the higher and nobler principles of reaſon and conſcience, by which all within is kept peaceful and ſerene—the worthieſt and beſt affections, terminating on the greateſt and moſt ſublime objects—all the ſacred diſpoſitions, of rational and fervent piety and devotion towards God, and of a warm, regular, and operative, benevolence to man—the ſublime pleaſures of reflection and hope—the unutterable joys of an approving conſcience—the heart reviving conſolations of an humble confidence towards God; a well-grounded truſt in his mercy and favour, his continued care and protection of us, through the various ſtages of this ſhort and tranſitory life, and the aſſurance of a bleſſed immortality to ſucceed it; the hope of which, as the glorious reſult of all, ſhall ere long be exchanged for fruition and enjoyment —— Theſe are the things which we conſider as conſtituting the chief good of man, and from which the

libertine

libertine and the ſinner abſolutely cuts himſelf off. It is directly incompatible with his character to ſuppoſe, that he can have any reliſh for the contemplation of divine truth, or that he will apply himſelf in good earneſt to the purſuit of it. Truths of this nature cannot but be offenſive to him, as light is to a weak and diſtempered eye. His ſchemes of ſenſual indulgence will alſo, it is probable, ſo much employ his thoughts and time, as to leave little or no inclination or opportunity for the improvement of his mind, in this, or any, kind of knowledge, that may be of real ſervice to him. The principal uſe he makes of his reaſon is to miniſter to his corrupt appetites; for the gratification of which, he will not, perhaps, ſcruple to engage in any deſigns, which his own wicked heart, or his aſſociates in vice, may ſuggeſt to him, however wide and complicated the miſchief may be, which he will hereby ſpread around him. In conſequence of

this, as to all thoſe various moral pleaſures and enjoyments, before hinted at, the neceſſary foundation is wanting. The habitual, prevailing, temper of his mind is directly the reverſe to that, from which only they can ſpring.

But will it therefore follow, becauſe the ſons of intemperance and riot are ſtrangers to theſe mental ſatisfactions, that there is therefore nothing real or ſubſtantial in them? What, if they have ſo far blinded their underſtanding, and hardened their heart, as utterly to have effaced all ſentiments and impreſſions of this nature, and really to regard them as a mere deluſion? But, are theſe men, who have ſo ſhamefully proſtituted their reaſon, the only perſons, whoſe judgment can be depended on in this caſe? Is there not ſomething within our own breaſts, which ſtrongly remonſtrates againſt ſuch licentious tenets, and pronounces

nounces them equally falſe and abſurd, as they are baſe and impious? Have we not alſo the united ſuffrage of thoſe, who have been moſt eminent for wiſdom, concurring with our own ſentiments and feelings on the ſide of virtue and religion? and ſhall we give up the cleareſt perceptions of our own minds, ſupported by the authority of ſo many reſpectable judges, in deference to the opinions of a ſet of libertines and profligates? But, mad as the part is which theſe men act, and bold and daring as they may be in their ſcoffs at every thing that is ſerious and good, even theſe men, it may be preſumed, have their lucid intervals, when ſober reflection takes place, and the voice of conſcience will be heard: at which ſeaſons, would they honeſtly declare the convictions of their minds, we ſhould find theſe ſtubborn and deadly foes to religion joining iſſue with its friends, by paſſing the ſevereſt cenſures

on thoſe very inſtances of conduct, which, in their gayer hours, they would be thought ſo highly to applaud. This reminds us of another mark of their inſanity, and that is,

2dly, They expoſe themſelves to the greateſt and moſt durable evils. And here, for the preſent, to paſs over thoſe numerous outward inconveniencies and miſchiefs, to which they lay themſelves open; ſuch as, the loſs of character, the withdrawment of their friendſhip, who ought ever to be moſt dear to them, and on whom they have perhaps no ſmall dependance, poverty of condition, painful and waſting diſtempers of body, and the like: all which are the natural effects of licentious manners—Let us particularly attend to thoſe ſtill more dreadful evils, of a mental nature, which follow them, and which, however induſtrious they may be to obliterate

terate the ſenſe of them, they cannot with all their art but in a great meaſure experience. Did they only deprive themſelves of thoſe pure and divine ſatisfactions, which flow from a life of virtue and religion; even this were a forfeiture which a perſon, in his ſober ſenſes, and who ſeriouſly thought what he was doing, would not make for the gain of the whole world. But together with the deprivation of this ſolid and laſting good of man, which they neceſſarily incur, their vicious habits have alſo a poſitive and moſt malignant influence on the mind. Thoſe criminal paſſions, by which they are ſo deeply inſlaved, are in themſelves, the immediate ſources of the moſt painful confuſion, agitating the breaſt into a continual tumult, and, in the prophet's ſtriking repreſentation, rendering it "like the troubled ſea, when it cannot "reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and "dirt. * Nor does their infelicity ſtop

* Iſaiah lvii. 20.

here

here; but is further enhanced by the terrible appendages of all the excruciating ſenſations of a guilty and condemning heart. It is, as was before hinted, we may juſtly ſuppoſe, ſcarce poſſible, for the moſt callous and hardened ſinner wholly to ſuppreſs the feelings of conſcience. There are ſeaſons when this faithful monitor will ſpeak, and conſtrain attention to its dictates, with a force which cannot be reſiſted. And what muſt be the reflections of that man, who, inveſted with theſe noble faculties, by which he might claim kindred with angelick natures; yea, and with the all-glorious God himſelf, whoſe workmanſhip he is; has ſunk himſelf even below the ſtate of a mere brute: who, for the ſake of the baſeſt and moſt ſordid gratifications, has parted with every thing, that could dignify and exalt him in the ſcale of being; has become, not only an uſeleſs, but a moſt injurious, member of ſociety, and has lived for no end, but to

diſgrace

diſgrace his nature, and fruſtrate all the kind and gracious intentions of his Creator! What words can deſcribe the piercing horrors, which the conſcious mind muſt feel on a review like this! and how can its miſery be exceeded, but by the execution of that dreadful ſentence, which it has to fear in a future exiſtence, as the deſerved puniſhment, of that vile and abject temper which it has contracted. For, to compleat the diſmal ſcene, we are to add here——that there is "a wrath to come," * which, the righteous governor of the world has given us the fulleſt aſſurance, ſhall finally overtake the impenitent ſinner; and of which the preſent cenſures of his own accuſing heart are the ſure and awful preſages; a wrath which will conſign him to a ſituation, where that book of remembrance, which will contain the black catalogue of his vices, ſhall be laid fully open to his view, with no other proſpect before him but the everlaſting deſtruction of both ſoul and body.

* 1 Theſſ. 1 10.

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There is, yet, one conſideration more, which will ſtill further evince the infatuation and madneſs of the ſons of lawleſs pleaſure, and, that is, they forfeit all that good, and ſubject themſelves to that complicated miſery, which has been briefly pointed out, in ſuch a purſuit of the indulgencies of ſenſe, as, inſtead of heightening and increaſing, really tends to lower and diminiſh them. All thoſe appetites, which the wiſe and good author of nature has wrought into our conſtitution, may no doubt be gratified under certain reſtrictions; and the indulgence of them beyond the bounds, which reaſon and religion preſcribe, ſerves rather to ſatiate than yield any true enjoyment. The paſſions which hurry him on to theſe exceſſes, though they may be originally founded in nature, whenever they produce this effect, are in an unnatural and diſorderly ſtate, and may fitly be compared to the thirſt of a man in a fever,

fever. The appetite in both caſes, though violent, is a ſickly, diſtempered, one: nor has the ſenſual man any more the true reliſh of that pleaſure, which is the object of his inordinate deſires, than a perſon in a fever has of any thing he can take to allay his immoderate thirſt.

Upon the whole: to apply the reflections which have been now ſuggeſted—Should there be any unhappy youth in this audience ſo miſerably deluded, as to fall under that reproachful charge which has been laid open; permit me, with the utmoſt ſerioufneſs, impreſſed with the tendereſt concern for your welfare, to urge upon you a cloſe and impartial ſcrutiny into your conduct. Widely as you may have deviated from the path of wiſdom, there is yet ſpace and opportunity afforded you to return. To you her friendly voice is ſtill directed, entreating you to hearken to her ſalutary counſels, as the only means of reſtoring you to ho-

nor, uſefulneſs, and comfort. You have, it may be, thoſe of very reſpectable characters, to whom you ſtand in the endearing relation of a child; who once conceived the moſt pleaſing hopes of your growing improvement, in every thing that could adorn and dignify human nature; all whoſe fond expectations you have utterly blaſted, and who, if the heart-cutting ſeparation has not already taken place, wearied by your extravagancies, are about to renounce and diſclaim you, as abandoned beyond recovery. But may you not yet regain their forfeited favour? Could they diſcover in you any ſigns of amendment, how would the tender feelings of parental affection, as well as the common principles of benevolence and goodneſs, plead in your behalf! diſappoint then, their fears —— revive their fainting ſpirits—and give ſuch convincing proofs of a change of character, as ſhall cauſe them to exult in the thought,

"This

" This my ſon was dead, and is alive again; he was loſt, and is found."

There is a ſtill higher conſideration to enforce this upon you, and that is, ſuch a conduct is indiſpenſably neceſſary to reſtore you to the favour of almighty God. Thoſe follies and vices, which have given juſt ground of offence to your earthly parents, are alſo in the higheſt degree diſpleaſing to your father who is in heaven. They are indeed fraught with the baſeſt ingratitude towards this all-glorious Being; and, if not repented of and forſaken, cannot fail to render you the dreadful victims of his righteous judgment. Even his moſt lovely and adorable attribute of goodneſs itſelf requires ſome examplary puniſhment to be inflicted on incorrigible offenders, as eſſential to the order and well-being of his rational and moral creation. From this worſt of all evils you may however yet be delivered. That God, whoſe nobleſt gifts

you have hitherto been ſo unwiſe as to pervert and abuſe to the loweſt purpoſes, ſtill waits to be gracious to you. " * God " is in Chriſt reconciling the world unto " himſelf, not imputing their treſpaſſes " unto them." The arms of his everlaſting mercy are now open for your reception—Inſtantly, then, and without any delay, fly to them—Preſent before him the " § ſacrifice of a broken and contrite heart—" And earneſtly implore his gracious aſſiſtance, in concurrence with your ſerious and diligent endeavours, to correct your evil habits, to renew a right ſpirit within you, and form you to that character, of ſobriety and temperance, of virtue and religion, which ſhall be the matter of your preſent and eternal rejoycing.

But I hope that I am ſpeaking to many others, who having, in aid to the powers

* 2 Cor. v. 19. § Pſ. li. 17.

of

of the mind, been bleſſed with a good and religious education, have made a ſuitable improvement of both; who have not wickedly departed from the living God, into the forbidden and deſtructive paths of vicious pleaſure; who have reſiſted the ſollicitations of that ſoft, but cruel, enchantreſs, and, inſtead of hearkening to her deluding ſpeech, have been attentive only to the calls of heavenly wiſdom.—And let me congratulate you, my friends, on the happy choice you have made, and the juſt part you have acted—Ye are indeed men of reaſon, who have the moſt ſubſtantial proofs to produce of the ſtrength and efficacy of this divine principle.—Ye are truly the ſons of freedom and liberty, who have nobly aſſerted, and ſtrenuouſly maintained, all the high prerogatives peculiar to your rank as the intelligent offspring of God—Go on to acquit yourſelves in the ſame becoming and honorable manner—Preſs forward with increaſing ardor, in that courſe of

piety

piety and virtue, which you have ſo well begun; till, having made this wiſe and beſt uſe of the talents with which you were entruſted in this ſtate of exiſtence, you ſhall "* receive the crown of life "which the Lord hath promiſed," and, "§ ſhine forth as the ſun in the kingdom "of your Father."

Which God, of his infinite mercy, grant may be our honor and happineſs, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen!

* James i. 12. § Matt. xiii. 43.

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THE END.